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TESTIMONY BEFORE
SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENERGY INDEPENDENCE & GLOBAL WARMING
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FOOD FOR THOUGHT: SUSTAINABILITY FROM COUNTER TO COMPOST.

Thank you Chairman Markey and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to discuss the success we have achieved in greening the House food service operations.

As Chief Administrative Officer of the House I am responsible for implementing Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Hoyer's Green the Capitol Initiative. This wide ranging initiative covers all aspects of the way we do business in the House including the food service operations.

Our goal with the House food services operations is to make it a premier showcase of sustainable, green, and healthy food operations. The House food service touches virtually all of the visitors to the Capitol from constituents, citizen advocates to lobbyists, federal employees and the press corps. And of course there is the House staff and Members of Congress who eat here almost every working day.

We have worked closely with our new food service vendor Restaurant Associates to implement the green changes. With each of the 240,000 meals served each month we can set high standards and send a green message in a tasty way.

Our highest priority was the banning of all plastic and Styrofoam from the cafeterias. The knives, forks, spoons, sandwich clam shells are among the items made from corn. Plates and coffee cups are made from paper. Entrée containers are made from sugarcane.

And contrary to urban myth already circulating the spoons do not melt in the soup!

All of these food service items are fully compostable. This sandwich clamshell or this fork will become dirt in 90 days at a commercial compost facility. Our biodegradable items are made in places like Maine and Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Georgia. New small businesses are being created to meet demand as food services are moving from the experimental and educational phase to actually using increasing amounts of biodegradable food service ware.

The House is demonstrating with every meal served that there is a market for U.S. manufacturers to provide green sustainable recyclable products.

While we are striving for perfection there is currently no compostable lids for coffee and hot drinks. We have been examining lids made from potatoes and are looking to implement a solution soon.

We send the compostable food service items along with all of the food waste from the front of the cafeteria and from the kitchens to a pulper. The pulper is like a giant garbage disposal that breaks down and dewateres the compost material. This reduces the volume of the compost material by a ratio of 10-1 and reduces the weight by as much as 4-1. The result is reduced hauling costs and reduced tipping fees by 60%-75%.

The food service waste that was being sent to landfills is now being taken to the Department of Agriculture composting facility at Beltsville, Maryland or to a commercial composting farm in nearby Crofton, Maryland. There we are literally turning what was garbage and going into a landfill into a commercially viable product.

Ultimately what we would like to see is some of the compost come back here to beautify the Capitol grounds.

But perhaps the real beauty is to the bottom line. While the new operation has only been up and running about 60 days, preliminary results are very encouraging. The waste hauler for the landfill picked up approximately 20 tons less material for the last 3 weeks of December, 2007 compared to 2006. This reduces the hauling costs and with tipping fees 30% less at the commercial composting facilities savings are realized on tipping fees too. And at the USDA facility there are no tipping fees at all! As noted above the pulper is reducing the weight of the compostables further reducing disposal costs by as much as 75%.

Sending the food service waste for composting also reduces our carbon foot print, a key issue for this committee. By diverting the food service waste from the landfill we are preventing it's conversion to methane--one of the most powerful greenhouse gases. We are examining ways to calculate the methane

reduction and use the savings as carbon offsets for other House operations. And we are not eating our food off items made from petroleum products.

Fully integrating a compost solution from the fork you pick up to the kitchen trimmings and sending it to be composted is a good business decision, saves taxpayer's money and is the right action for the environment.

We also looked at the food itself. The House is the largest account for Pura Vida coffee which is fair trade, bird friendly by being shade grown, and organic.

The beef, chicken, and pork are all hormone free. The seafood served is certified sustainable caught as defined by the Monterey Aquarium seafood guidelines. The shell eggs used are from chickens in a cage free environment.

When one of the workers was asked what his job was under the previous food vendor his response was "Opening cans." Under Restaurant Associates the amount of fresh produce and meat is approximately 85% up from an estimated 35% under the previous vendor. This switch to fresher food and the resulting trimmings is complemented at the back end with the pulper and composting solutions.

The House is promoting the buying of food locally defined purchasing food produced in a 150 mile radius from the Capitol when possible. The House is also emphasizing the purchase of organically produced food, and providing a market for new and existing farms and businesses to meet these needs. We are also reducing our carbon foot print by reducing the distance food has to be transported.

There are other greening stories to tell in the food service operations. The recycling stations are made from recycled glass and other material. The paint used to spruce up the cafeterias was low in volatile organic compounds. We are using electronic signage in the cafeterias to highlight daily menu specials. Bamboo flooring was used in the convenience store.

Energy and water conservation are also critical areas. All new equipment in the kitchens will meet the highest energy efficiency standards. New dish washers are being purchased to conserve water.

Vending machines is a little thought about area where significant energy savings can be found. The House is swapping out the approximately 80 old machines with the most energy efficient or Energy Star machines available. We are also changing the way the machines are operated to maximize energy savings. This includes delamping machines in well lit areas, changing compressor operations,

and letting temperatures rise in soda machines in the middle of the night. These changes are estimated to save as much as \$20,000 annually.

We have made a good start. But we know there is much more to do to be more sustainable, greener, and continue to reduce our carbon foot print. We will constantly review our purchasing and operations to be at the leading of green cafeteria operations.

Chairman Markey and Members of the Committee thank you for the opportunity to tell the story of our green food service operations. Restaurant Associates has been a hard working partner in putting together one of the greenest food service operations in the United States.

Bon Appétit!